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ABSTRACT

A discussion of second language (L2) teaching focuses on how language teachers can transfer their training and experience in L2 instruction to instruction in English as a Second Language (ESL). Learners of L2s and of ESL pass through the same learning stages, and while the skills focus may be different, the process is the same. A variety of language teaching approaches are examined, and ways in which they can be applied to either L2 or ESL, or elements that be applied in both contexts, are noted. The approaches include the natural approach, whole language approach, use of realia, Total Physical Response, the direct method, various methods of grouping students, and conventional and alternative assessment techniques both for placement and for monitoring student progress. Some ways to minimize bias in testing limited-English-proficient (LEP) students are also noted. The paper concludes that in classroom practice, methods and approaches used in the foreign language classroom will serve as solid background for language teachers called upon to teach ESL or LEP students. Contains six references. (MSE)

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Making the Most of Positive Transfer: From Teaching Foreign Language to Teaching ESL

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Marion, Arkansas

ESL Academy, Fall 1996
5723 Teaching People of Other Cultures

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Making the Most of Positive Transfer:
From Teaching Foreign Language to Teaching ESL

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As a foreign language teacher and a recent participant in an ESL Academy, I was intrigued by the connections between the two fields. The basic principles of language acquisition are the same for the acquisition of any language, and the steps that teachers follow to assist students in reaching the goal of acquiring proficiency in a second language are necessarily often quite similar. This may seem to be self-evident to some, but as a newcomer to the field of ESL, I found these similarities to be reassuring. For teachers anticipating an opportunity to use the methods, activities and assessments presented at the Academy, it is easy to see where positive transfer of learned skills can take place to smooth the path from foreign-language teacher to English-as-a-second-language teacher.

The four stages of language acquisition according to Stephen Krashen and Tracy Terrell are:

1. Pre-production
2. Early production
3. Speech emergence
4. Intermediate fluency. (Jackson, ESL Academy)

Learners in both ESL and foreign language classrooms move through these same stages. Although it may be true that the focus is different for students learning a foreign language in a regular high school program (many times only to meet a requirement) and for those attempting to perfect English skills needed for survival, the process is still the same.

The Natural Approach, developed by Terrell and based on Krashen's model (Terrell, 1977,333), is a method that seeks to match activities used in language learning to the four stages of language acquisition. At the ESL Academy, the presenters proposed this approach use in the ESL classroom. It is basic to the proficiency-oriented foreign language classroom because it focuses on developing communicative competence. For the foreign language learner, the

classroom may be the only place where he is required to display his competence. The teacher is required to create a version of the "real-life" experiences in which the student would be called upon to use what he knows for survival. For example, a typical foreign language classroom activity when teaching food vocabulary is to set up a "cafe" where students play the roles of customer and waiter. The students ask and answer questions that would be expected in this type of situation. Many skills can be practiced this way, but the student knows that once the "play" is over, he can return to his world of comfort. For the LEP student, the real-life situations do not need to be created, for they are all too real for him. His communicative competence will manifest itself in his increasing ability to cope with the everyday situations at school and in the English-speaking community. As he progresses through the stages, both he and the teacher will see the increase in his ability to participate in classroom activities and playground conversations, all conducted in his new language. The ESL situation is a much more contextualized and relevant use of language, but the goal is for the foreign language classroom to encourage the same kind of skills development.

Other aspects of the Natural Approach are:

1. learning of grammar rules as incidental to developing communicative competence;
2. lowering the affective filter to encourage attempts at communication;
3. recognizing the teacher as a guide rather than as an enforcer of rules; and,
4. fostering a "reciprocal interaction" not only between teachers and students, but also among students. (Jackson, ESL Academy)

The foreign language classroom for many years has been the source of much consternation on the part of students because its aspects were basically the opposite of those given here. Teachers did not encourage students to create with the language because they might not follow every rule. Students saw the teacher as the "sage on the stage" with all the answers, rarely having anything to

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learn from her students. This often created high levels of anxiety for students, now known to be counter-productive to learning. Many experts in the field now acknowledge that the foreign language teacher must encourage her students to be grammatically correct enough to communicate their thoughts to speakers of the target language without creating undue fear about errors.

If lowering the affective filter is important for creating a positive learning environment in the foreign language classroom where the student knows he will be released soon into the world of people who speak his language, it is much more crucial for the LEP student who must face a world of people who do not speak his language. The foreign language teacher who wants success for his/her students encourages an atmosphere of mutual respect where everyone learns from everyone else. An observant teacher in any classroom will find that often it is a student who can best interpret the material for his struggling peer. Teachers can glean new perspectives from old concepts, mnemonic devices, and even learning games from creative students who are learning lessons for the first time. When students teach students, higher-order thinking that produces original approaches is a natural by-product. The ESL teacher must be sensitive to these needs and abilities, realizing that LEP students rely on their classmates even more because of the special bond they share. Also, the ESL teacher should be aware that the students' anxieties probably increase when they leave the ESL classroom.

One of the many skills the foreign language teacher takes to the ESL setting is a flexibility concerning the use of different methodologies to accomplish linguistic objectives. The whole-language method has various elements that can be utilized in both types of classrooms. This method uses authentic literature to teach reading, grammar, vocabulary and other skills. The idea of integrating the language arts using a single story as a springboard for reading, writing, listening

and speaking activities has wide appeal as a means of teaching several skills based on one set of vocabulary and structures. Students of all ages respond to stories with familiar elements. Fairy tales and legends from different cultures often share similar characteristics, themes and morals. For an ESL example, a teacher can use the story of Jack and the Beanstalk for oral-reading practice by using a big book version and asking different students to read a page at a time. All those not reading aloud are listening to the story, which introduces another type of activity at the same time. If the students write their own original ending to the story and read it to the class, the teacher has included the elements of listening, writing and using higher-order thinking skills. When the teacher includes a similar story from Venezuelan tradition in the lesson (Samaniego et al., 1994, 188-190), she provides the opportunity for compare/contrast activities. When used with graphic organizers, such as Venn diagrams, these activities also promote higher-order thinking skills. Teaching grammar through writing and reading is an important method for grammar instruction (Nixon, 1991, 61-62). The teacher who tolerates some misspellings in early writing assignments and doesn't dwell on grammatical errors that do not prohibit understanding in speech makes it clear to the learner that communication rather than linguistic perfection is the expected result. This is true in almost all second language classrooms.

Foreign language teachers have long used authentic materials in addition to formal literature for cultural information. Realia, such as advertising copy, songs, recipes, and menus, can also be used in both classrooms as examples of varying degrees of formality in writing, idiomatic language and vocabulary (Lems, 1995, 11). The foreign language teacher may have more difficulty collecting these items than the ESL teacher, but both settings need the authenticity that these everyday printed materials provide. Cultural information embedded in such artifacts is an interesting bonus. Something as commonplace as a soda can or a

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movie advertisement can reveal facts about the target culture that students will find fascinating. It is only a short walk from this interest to grammar/vocabulary instruction for a clearer understanding of the language being used. Teaching language through literature in any form is contextualized because grammar and vocabulary are integrated naturally in the material. It should be noted here that Dr. Stephan and Linda Jackson, at the Arkansas ESL Academy, find that a teacher must combine whole-language and phonics instruction to achieve the goals of the second-language classroom. Students must be able to pronounce the second language with at least enough accuracy to be understood. The teaching of phonics and guided pronunciation training with an emphasis on modeling and positive reinforcement can help to achieve this goal.

Many of the specific activities or types of activities used in the foreign language classroom transfer easily to the ESL classroom. Total Physical Response is one method that generates activities especially applicable to the preproduction stage of language acquisition. The teacher uses commands and modeling to elicit non-verbal responses focuses attention on the comprehension of spoken language. Following the Direct Method, from which TPR is adapted, the target language is the only one used for instruction. The beliefs that understanding of the spoken word must occur before speaking, that the kinesthetic nature of the activity guides understanding through action, and that speech will emerge naturally when the target language is internalized are all underlying principles of TPR (Omaggio, 1986, 72-73).

In the foreign language classroom, TPR is used effectively to both present and reinforce new vocabulary and structures. Eventually, students become able to create their own commands for other students or, to create an unusual classroom situation, for the teacher. The usual TPR approach has the teacher begin by first giving the commands in the target language, then modeling the

requested behavior until students begin to respond spontaneously with the correct actions. When most students are responding correctly, The teacher stops modeling but continues to give commands, always using the target language. Once all vocabulary or structures have been practiced, the teacher can turn over the commanding role to students who take turns giving commands they have already heard or making up new ones. This often creates humorous situations which can serve to remove inhibitions and involve even the student who is slow to begin speaking by having him follow, rather than give, commands until he is comfortable with speaking.

In the ESL classroom, the learner has been hearing the target language spoken often but without complete understanding. Total Physical Response activities, used in conjunction with other approaches, can isolate grammar concepts and specific vocabulary. An authentic situation for these students might have the teacher creating commands that incorporate terms and requests that the students would hear during the course of a school day. This is an opportunity for students to make errors and receive instruction in an environment that is almost identical to the regular school setting, but which is sensitive to his particular needs and concerns. The practice in listening without the expectation of speech can lower anxiety for students not prepared to express themselves orally. The teacher can decide if and when to begin asking students to create their own commands as she monitors individual progress. If the classroom has students of varying ability levels (like almost all foreign language classrooms), the pre-production and early production students can experience success by physically performing the spoken commands, while a speech-emergent student might progress from being able to mimic the teacher's commands for the other students to eventually being able to create his own commands.

While TPR is often limited to language produced only by the teacher, co-operative learning is a strategy in which students work together (preferably in the target language) in small groups to achieve some outcome. This approach is successful in the foreign language and ESL classrooms because the students are required to negotiate meaning through the exchange of knowledge and the experience of using a second language (Kaufman et al., 1995, 57). Foreign language classrooms seem perfectly oriented to group work, in general, and cooperative learning in particular. In a regular class period of 45-60 minutes, it is almost impossible for the teacher to speak to and evaluate a response from each of a group of 25-30 students. Cooperative learning enhances partner practice by encouraging the use of higher-order thinking skills to solve a problem or arrive at some conclusion. When students do this through the target language, a great deal of thought and language can be produced. An example of this kind of activity would be a group of students role-playing a parent, teacher and student meeting each other at a school open house. Teacher- or text-given cues requiring mostly known with some unfamiliar grammar and vocabulary can be provided to give the activity structure. If the conversation is performed spontaneously without notes, students must use the target language to communicate what each thinks is appropriate for his character in the situation.

Dr. Stephan Jackson and Linda Jackson (ESL Academy) point out that in the ESL setting, two kinds of grouping can be effective. They are:

1. heterogeneous, for integrated oral language activities; and,
2. homogeneous, for specific skills acquisition.

A combination of both can be used most effectively. Heterogeneous, or mixed-ability, grouping is best used when a more advanced student in the group can

provide more fluent examples and peer correction. Activities designed to generate language, such as "List all the reasons you can think of for going to the library," are best accomplished with heterogeneous grouping. Specific skills acquisition activities are better accomplished in homogeneous groups, where students are at a similar ability level. This encourages balanced contributions from all group members. In an example of this kind of activity students would write the names of all the objects in the room that are green. While the foreign language teacher may use grouping because of different motivations, her goals of encouraging higher-order thinking and using language to accomplish a goal are the same as in the ESL classroom. In any grouping, all contributions are to be valued and everyone can be included, from the preproduction student's nod for "yes" to the intermediate student's creative use of language for expression of original thoughts.

All classrooms must include the element of assessment. In discussing assessment in foreign language and ESL classroom settings, the distinction must be made between initial assessment for placement purposes and ongoing classroom assessment. Of course, initial assessment is not normally an issue in the foreign language setting. Most students come into a first-year class with little or no experience in the new language. An informal, oral survey can assess prior knowledge. Another way to find out what kind of language training has taken place is to include the question as part of a general autobiographical sketch prepared by the student himself.

The requirements for initial assessment of LEP students is more stringent and detailed. The identification process should begin at the time the student is enrolled, and a "yes" answer is given to any of the Home Language Survey questions. The student is then tested using a state-approved English language aural/oral proficiency test. The student is identified as Limited English Proficient

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based on the tests' publisher's standards. Also, any student who is in the fourth grade or above, and who scores at or below the thirty-second percentile on the reading or writing sub-parts of a norm-referenced test should be tested for English-language reading and writing proficiency (Hernandez, ESL Academy, 103). Various faculty members may be called upon to learn how to test students. For example, in the Marion (Arkansas) Public School District, counselors, elementary principals and the high school Spanish teacher are all potential testers. The tester does not need to be able to communicate with the student in his native language in order to administer the test, although having someone who is able to discuss the tests and plans for the student's education with parents would be helpful. This may be where the foreign language teacher can be utilized in the initial placement process, providing, of course, that the teacher does speak the home language of the student.

Like methodology itself, assessment in the L2 classroom has changed a great deal from the early days of language learning. Assessment is now seen as a collection of information about the progress of students. A program for assessment should use many different tools to gather and evaluate work and learning. Commonly-used types of assessments include:

1. objective - Tests are true, false, multiple choice;
2. performance - Students complete a task or construct a response to demonstrate knowledge;
3. naturalistic - Performance is observed as a part of the natural classroom setting;
4. alternative - Judgment of progress is not based on the results of a single test. Other options are portfolios, journals, etc.; and
5. authentic - In this form of alternative assessment, real-life functions are incorporated.

In order to get the best and most complete picture of a learner's ability level and progress, a combination of these types of assessments is essential (Hernandez, 99-100).

The basic achievement tests used in most foreign language classrooms over the years have often focused on non-contextualized, discrete-point exercises that do not require student to show a communicative ability to use language in a natural setting. However, completely open-ended or free-response tests items may not give teachers the information they need about how well students perform in terms of specific curricular objectives. In order to meet both objectives, a combined approach should be used. A single test can contain some sections that focus on specific grammar and vocabulary, while others guide students into expressing themselves in the second-language using the learned structures and vocabulary. Periodic general written and oral achievement tests can give a picture of the student's overall level of competence. The combination of these kinds of tests can give the foreign language teacher a clearer evaluation of both student progress and programming needs in the curriculum (Omaggio, 1986, 314).

The emphasis on assessment is somewhat different in the ESL classroom. While both settings require the teacher to constantly monitor student progress (or its opposite) and adjust teaching strategies to fit the needs of a group, there may be more emphasis on initial assessment of English ability and on the proper identification, placement and planning of services for LEP students. Teachers, counselors, and administrators must additionally consider testing competence in the basic subject areas. This enables them to plan appropriate instructional strategies, while adding yet another dimension to the ESL testing issue. In all testing situations, the LEP student is susceptible to testing biases and problems that stem from actual testing practices usually associated with standardized tests.

For example, in many countries, the multiple-choice, true/false test with a separate bubble sheet for answering is practically unknown. Educators in these countries usually prefer the essay question format (Hernandez,101). Students may be so unfamiliar with this format that their performance is affected negatively. The student also has to negotiate both the language and the content of the test. An adult who is a native speaker of German (Martha Brickey, personal interview, 1997) gives an example which illustrates this difficulty:

> "I was taking the board examination to obtain a cosmetology license. A question on the test asked whether or not it was necessary to lubricate hair before rolling on permanent wave rods or not. I only knew the word 'lubricate' as it applied to car maintenance. I asked the proctor if it meant the same thing. She told me that it was, although she had been instructed not to answer any questions about the test."

Special consideration must be taken to see that the student's lack of ability in English does not obscure his competence with language concepts in general or his subject-area competence. Finally, culturally-biased test items or language may work against the proper evaluation of the LEP students (Hernandez,101-102). An instructor teaching the method used by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages for conducting an oral-proficiency interview told of interviewing (in English) a newly-arrived Latin American student. The situation that the two were to role-play had the interviewer assume the role of a woman who, because she was going away on vacation, was asking her neighbor to take care of her house and plants while she was away. The student was to play the role of the neighbor. The interviewer set up the situation and began to prompt the student to ask questions about what she would be required to do in order to take care of the house and plants. After a few attempts to engage the student, who did not seem to be following the idea behind the situation, the interviewer stopped the role-play and asked if the student

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understood what was supposed to be going on in the dialogue. The student replied that she understood the language being used, but commented that she had never heard of anyone asking someone to do such a thing. In her country, this practice simply did not exist. She did not possess adequate cultural background to participate linguistically in this setting. Once she was aware of this, the interviewer tried another situation more familiar to the student's cultural background. She was then able to accurately assess her language ability. Had she not been sensitive to this need, she might have formed an inaccurate perception of the subject's ability.

In order to minimize the effects of these problems and biases in the ESL classroom, teachers should use the combined-assessment approach to testing. Just as a foreign language teacher would not rely only on a listening comprehension or writing test to evaluate a student's ability, she should not rely on a single instrument to evaluate the LEP student. While a state-approved language-dominance or language-proficiency test may be the main instrument for identifying and placing LEP students, other evaluations should continue to take place much as they do in the foreign language classroom. While a discrete-point grammar and vocabulary test will help the teacher check for understanding of the concepts being presented, an alternative assessment that allows for some freedom of expression, but that also requires use of learned skills can be more effective for gauging communicative competence.

Alternative assessments are as important to the ESL classroom as they are to the foreign language setting, and moreso in some respects. Although justifications may be slightly different, the end results are similar. LEP students may find it difficult to work under the usual time constraints imposed in classroom assessment. Alternative methods may be able to give them the time to show what hey have learned and can do with the language (Kaufman et al., 1995, 82).

An example of this kind of assessment might be to include the creation of a family tree chart with drawings or photographs of family members (if culturally appropriate) in a lesson teaching relationship terms. The student could make an oral presentation about his family either to the class or to the teacher alone using his family tree as a visual aid and graphic organizer. This could give the student some time to internalize the vocabulary while applying it to his personal situation. If notes are allowed, the student turns in a written version of the presentation, or labels the tree with English relationship words, several skills including reading, writing, and speaking will have been tested with one exercise. Giving time to prepare the graph and notes at home or in class may provide the LEP student time to practice the new vocabulary and show that he knows what the words mean in a personal way.

The good news for foreign language teachers who are being called upon to serve their districts in some capacity related to teaching English as a second language is that many of the skills they now possess will transfer to their new responsibilities. Whether directly or with some modifications, the knowledge, methods, and assessments used in most foreign language programs are applicable to the ESL setting.

Some of the specific information that is useful to language teachers relates to the language acquisition process, the Natural Approach, and the need for cultural sensitivity. Since the basic process by which people learn a second language is the same regardless of the language, the foreign language teacher has an advantage over those who are not already trained in second-language acquisition because she has experienced the process first-hand and watched it take place in her students. This provides insight that should forestall some of the frustration and confusion that sometimes develop when working with LEP students. For a foreign language teacher accustomed to the principles of the

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Natural Approach, the change from foreign language to ESL could be easier than for someone who is not familiar with these ideas and their applications in a classroom. ESL students need to be able to learn in a supportive environment where all contributions are valued and productive interaction is encouraged. The teacher who can seek to develop communicative competence without focusing excessively on errors will probably have more success with ESL students than one who insists on perfection and is not interested in the affective needs of her students. Those needs may be culturally-based. Foreign language teachers are often called on to explain differences between cultures. The teacher may offer an explanation of why a Hispanic male student exhibits hostility toward his female teachers by describing the male-dominated society which still exists in many parts of Latin America today. This requires a sensitivity that is critical in working with LEP students. Comments from and attitudes of local residents can be hurtful and confusing to newcomers or to children who have grown up in a home where English is not the principal language. The ESL teacher can provide supports and encouragement when such unfortunate situations arise. She has probably done so many times in the past in her own classroom or when dealing with the general public. All of these capabilities will serve her well in her ESL experiences.

In actual classroom practice, the methods and approaches used in the foreign language classroom will serve as a solid background for ESL. The whole-language method using literature to teach multiple skills has many foreign language and ESL applications, from comparing fairy tales across cultures to using realia to interest students in real-life language applications. Total Physical Response is an especially useful strategy for the LEP student. Whether the student is just beginning to acquire the new language or has already progressed a great deal, he can be challenged and achieve success in the command-respond activities. Credit is given for being able to follow the

commands and for being able to create commands. In cooperative learning, students learn the value of working in a group and of using the new language to accomplish a task. This is useful in many kinds of classrooms, but the ESL application is certainly appropriate. The support of a group is important to student finding their way in a new culture. The language generated in these experiences may not be error-free, but if communication is accomplished, at least one goal has been reached. The most important aspect of being able to use all of the methods is the flexibility to try new approaches and activities. The foreign language/ESL teacher can learn new activities from many sources, including colleagues and professional development meetings. An open mind and willingness to experiment to find what works best are important characteristics for these teachers.

Where assessment is concerned, training may be required to learn how to administer and use the results of a state-approved test of oral/aural proficiency. The importance of conducting these tests in a correct and timely manner probably cannot be underestimated. They are used to evaluate student needs and plan placement and instruction. Once in the ESL classroom, the teacher must maintain ongoing assessment. This is best accomplished by a combined approach including alternative and authentic assessments. The teacher who is able to use these various kinds of tests is able to arrive at a complete picture of students' abilities and needs. The cultural issues in assessment are also important. Again, the foreign language teacher's sensitivity to different cultures is of great value in these situations. Knowing which kinds of tests will elicit the most accurate assessment of the students' language skills and being able to avoid problems that can arise from common testing methods are both abilities that a foreign language teacher is likely to possess or to be willing to learn.

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The current situation in the Marion (Arkansas) Public School District requires all faculty members who may be called upon to work with LEP students to remain flexible. My current role (1996-97) is to assist teachers in learning how to serve these students. Although I have had more specific training than others in the district, I have less practical experience. I have had several native speakers of other languages in my classroom over the four years that I have been at Marion, but none were classified as LEP. Because of my training, I must be prepared to administer tests, suggest classroom strategies that have been recommended to me by other professionals and provide general support to teachers and administrators. Some of the insights that I possess by way of my foreign-language experience are very useful in discussing cultural differences, limiting bias on tests and in classrooms, and in proposing ways of handling sensitive situations. Some of these skills and insights have been acquired through my foreign language training and the experience of speaking and teaching Spanish. The benefits of the Arkansas ESL Academy for me and my district are that I have learned some practical activities and basic methodology, as well as useful assessment strategies that I can pass on to others and file for my own future use. Some of these strategies are also useful for the foreign language classroom.

The most important aspect of the ESL issue is that teachers and other faculty members provide the necessary assistance to LEP students. This requires that all those concerned work toward accurate initial assessment that clarifies needs of the LEP student, appropriate methodology that guides the student through the process of acquiring a new language, and activities and classroom assessments that actively engage the student in his own learning. All of these provide the linguistic support that is basic to all future learning that will take place through the English language. Achieving this means that schools are

giving these students all possible opportunities in a country built on the concept that everyone should have the chance to succeed. Since several Academy presenters mentioned that "ESL teaching is just good teaching," it seems that, in fact, the goals of teachers of English as a second language are not at all unlike those for all teachers who want the very best for their students.

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Note: The Arkansas ESL Academy was a series of intensive seminars intended to provide professional educators and others with the necessary skills to work with limited English proficient students in Arkansas's public schools and in other agencies. These seminars in 1995-96 were sponsored by the Arkansas Department of Education and the Tyson Foods Corporation. College credit could be earned through Arkansas Tech University toward Arkansas's four-course endorsement in ESL.

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